

UNEXPECTED TORTOISES AND TURTLES OF THE WORLD
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This research attempts to collate data on mystery tortoises and turtles from around the world into as thorough an account as possible. I have divided the research into seven sections: Africa, North and Central America, South America, Asia, Australia, Europe, and Oceans (including islands).

It was found that Asia and Europe have had the most stories and South America the least. But this does not necessarily reflect “reality” (whatever that is!), just my own research. However it probably comes pretty close. No examples were found in polar regions, but note the white carapace of the *Rhapsody* ship giant turtle sighting. Perhaps this was a kind of camouflage, seeing as this sighting took place off Newfoundland? If this turtle originated further north in Arctic regions, then it may well have been concealment. Other alleged turtles with white carapaces may have been dead whales floating upside down. It has to be said that all the European examples are to be found in the United Kingdom. I have deliberately not included well-known tortoises and turtles such as the Beast of 'Busco, the pet tortoise of Gilbert White the naturalist, and the large *Rafetus swinhoei* turtle in the Hoan Kiem lake in Hanoi, Vietnam.

AFRICA

1) The most famous African turtle cryptid is the *Ndendeki*. Dr Roy Mackal (1987) wrote in *A Living Dinosaur?*: “We first heard about

the 'dinosaur turtle' from Gilbert Bonguenele Manengue, the agent de la Sécurité Publique at Brazzaville. . . . He reported that he had received his information from eyewitness observers living in the village of Boha; data obtained from him, therefore, were second hand. Informants may have felt it was quite enough simply to say 'giant turtle' about an animal whose shell was some 4 to 5 metres (12 to 15 feet) in diameter. Such a giant turtle hardly seems believable, yet the fossil record includes both marine (*Archelon ischyros*) and land turtles (*Colossochelys atlas*), their remains indicating animals 6 metres (20 feet) in length. However, not even the giant tortoises of the Seychelles Islands (1.2 metres, or 4 feet) approach the reported dimensions of *Ndendecki*. The leatherback turtle, a living species (*Dermochelys coriacea*) does reach a length of 3 metres (10 feet), but it is found only in the sea.

"The shell of the *Ndendecki* was described as more rounded than other kinds of turtles. In spite of its size the natives neither fear it nor consider it dangerous. Although information on its diet was generally vague, a few informants suggested that it fed on detritus, the rich organic matter found at the bottom of rivers, lakes, and pools. . . . [L]et us try to identify the *Ndendecki*. Based on reported descriptions, we require a very large, freshwater turtle, both carnivorous (or omnivorous) and amphibious. Marcellin Agagna was able to identify the *Ndendecki* as one and the same with *Trionyx triunguis* . . . this species fulfils all of the descriptive features rather well. I find this is gratifying indeed because it adds greatly to the degree of confidence we may place on other descriptions provided by our indigenous observers. Agagna sets the maximum size of the turtles at 2 metres (6 ½ feet), which allows a factor of roughly '2' for exaggeration by informants—not unreasonable in my experience. . . . The animal is considered to be quite aggressive and makes frequent excursions onto land, pulling itself up steep riverbanks by its strong claws. Along the Nile, according to local Arabs, this turtle searches for and feeds on crocodile eggs. Others report that it also eats crocodile hatchlings. The major food supply appears to be fish and shellfish which it can consume underwater."

2) In April 2011 Dale Drinnon posted in his *Frontiers of Zoology* blog the following comments under the headline “Titanic Turtles of Tele”: “*Ndenki* (sic) is spoken of as a truly tremendous freshwater turtle in parts of the Congo River drainage and especially around Lake Tele. This is another matter of some confusion in Cryptozoology. Some individual softshell turtles of the known, identified species can grow to quite enormous sizes. A pertinent example comes from Darren Naish’s blog:

“‘Anyway, Asia isn’t the only continent with giant softshells. There are also giant African species (or one anyway: the African softshell *Trionyx triunguis*), and in October 2009 post on the SA Reptiles discussion board, forum-user Herphabitat posted several photos of a huge, dead softshell he and colleagues discovered on a peninsula in the mouth of the Congo River. From a distance, they first assumed that the carcass was that of a dead sea turtle (perhaps a Leatherback *Dermochelys coriacea*). On discovering that it was a softshell, they assumed that it had died further up-river and had then been washed down.’”

Dale also commented: “The statements made by the Native informants about giant turtles were taken down by Roy Mackal are published in a book about looking for living dinosaurs in the Congo basin; and the giant softshell turtles as described would be truly incredible if the dimensions that were alleged would be true. It is conceded by all parties that the figures given by the Natives are very badly exaggerated when they are talking about turtles three and four metres in carapace diameter, six to eight metres or more counting the outstretched neck. Most experts pick up their suitcases and leave in a hurry with a crisp ‘Good Day to you!’ when they hear that part.

“The south Asian turtles are also alleged to grow very large, as big as an oceanic leatherback turtle in the Ganges according to

stories *there* and the proponents of the Hoan Kiem turtle's special status have stated that it is the largest known turtle on earth. Those statements are also generally taken with a grain of salt. . . ."

NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

1) "A creature called the Carvana was described from the swamplands and lagoons of eastern Texas: 'This insidious predator of swamplands and lagoons in eastern Texas was described by a Mexican migrant named Aluna, who allegedly lost livestock to the creature in the mid nineteenth century. According to Aluna's story, no Carvana was ever seen alive, though its remains were sometimes found during droughts, when its marshy habitat evaporated. On those occasions, local settlers and aboriginal tribesmen allegedly discovered skeletons resembling those of large turtles, with shells 10-12 feet long and 6 feet wide, while the beasts head and tail resembled an alligator's. In life, the Caravana lay submerged in mud, waiting to pounce on prey that included livestock and human beings. Skeptics suggest that tales of monsters "never seen alive" refer to early discovery of fossil dinosaurs or Ice Age megafauna.'" (Newton 2005)

2) There was also a story of an American hairy tortoise (Battaile 1879). See the Asia section for similar tales.

To the editors of the *Popular Science Monthly*:

Noticing your interesting extract from "Land and Water" concerning the "hairy tortoise", I take the liberty of mentioning a similar species found to my knowledge in the lakes of this valley. Its description tallies almost exactly with that of the Chinese variety, except perhaps in size. It is about three inches in length by two and a half breadth, is very closely covered by its shell, the carapace is not hinged, and out of some dozen specimens examined by me not one was without the coat of water-grass. Its habitat

is at the bottom of shallow lakes and ponds, and near the submerged roots of trees, where it is often caught with the hook. It has a remarkably fetid odour. The grassy or confervoid covering is not of any great length, generally about one half or three fourths of an inch. It is, I believe an undescribed species, though Mr. Aggasiz may have had a specimen among his collection of tortoises from the Mississippi Valley.

Very Respectfully, J. F. Battaile, Yazoo City,
December 8, 1878.

3) A case of a tortoise or turtle falling from the sky is by no means a one-off occurrence:

Liverpool Echo, September 13, 1884

During a heavy rain storm at Canton, Ohio, a few days ago, a two-and-a-half-pound snapping turtle fell from the sky with such force that its shell was cracked. It rebounded like a ball. It is still alive.

Sheffield Evening Telegraph, August 20, 1887

Half-a-dozen turtles fell with rain at New Brunswick, New Jersey, recently, and scientific theories were thickly advanced until it was discovered that they had been left on a neighbouring roof to sun, and had been washed off with the very rain that flooded the town.

Monthly Weather Review (May 1917) cites *The Monthly Weather Review* for May, 1884 (p. 215) for the account that during a severe hailstorm “at Bovina, 8 miles east of Vicksburg, Miss., a gopher turtle 6 by 8 inches and entirely encased in ice fell with the hail.”

Turtle Mystery Solved at St. Cloud

Fergus Falls (MN) Daily Journal, July 6, 1955

St. Cloud, Minn. (AP)—A six-inch turtle perched

on a cluster of telephone cables 30 feet above the ground posed as a mystery for awhile here today. Guessers first tried to link it with the rainstorm which brought nearly an inch of rain during the night. Others theorized they had spotted a kind of flying turtle. The neighbourhood children came forward with an explanation. They said a man had found the turtle in the street. Fearing it might be run over, he picked it up to toss it into a vacant lot. His toss was high and wide and the turtle landed on the cables, where it stayed until this morning when a telephone lineman brought it down.

According to *Living Wonders* by John Michell and Robert Rickard (1982), "in August 1975, during construction work at Fort Worth, Texas, a green terrapin was found embedded under a mound of hardened concrete which had presumably been poured onto it. It was thought to have been there for at least a year. It died 36 hours after its rescue." A photograph is in *Living Wonders*.

Here is a testimony from a gentleman who narrowly escaped being struck on the head by a tortoise which fell out of a clear blue sky. Thanks to Bob Skinner who alerted me to his friend to whom this happened in Mexico City circa 1980.

"At about 7 a.m., after pegging an item of clothing to the washing line I turned and stepped back inside the flat when I heard a sharp thump. In the exact spot where a few seconds before I had been standing, I saw a tortoise lying on its back in a pool of blood. It had a brown shell, 6-7 inches long, and was still alive despite what appeared to be serious injury: its shell was badly cracked and by the end of the day it had lost a lot of blood. After a couple of days its wounds became infested with maggots, but treating them with Gentian violet killed the maggots and the tortoise made a complete recovery.

"I speculated that the tortoise might have been thrown from a nearby rooftop or dropped by an eagle. I've only recently learned

that Golden Eagles pick up tortoises and drop them to break the shell, and it was known that a smaller species of eagle sometimes escaped from a nearby rooftop where it was kept as a pet.

“In true Fortean manner, it could have just fallen from directly above for no good reason.”

4) In 1994 the magazine *Omni* reported on “Moby Turtle” as follows: “Move over Nessie. Recent reports tell of a giant killer turtle living in Island Lake, Illinois, some 40 miles north-west of Chicago.

“It all started about a year ago, when resident Liz Herman spotted two large snapping turtles mating in the water just beyond her backyard sea wall. ‘These turtles were huge, maybe three feet long’, says Herman. ‘My husband Kevin didn’t believe me until he saw my photos. Then he showed them around town.’ ‘Soon rumors were flying,’ says Georgine Cooper, a town trustee. ‘The turtle was said to be anywhere from the size of a small pickup truck to an 18-wheel semi.’

“‘Our Water Department supervisor, Neil DeYoung, tried to catch the turtle,’ adds local police chief Eugene Bach. ‘All he got for his trouble was bent hooks.’

“Bach refuses to fuel the killer-turtle rumours. In fact, he thinks the turtle may be an alligator snapper released into the lake some years ago by a local boy. ‘Alligator snappers,’ he says, ‘can grow to more than 60 pounds and can be 25 inches long. Listen,’ he adds. ‘I could tell you that when kids hang their feet over the pier they get chewed up, but that wouldn’t be true.’—Anita Baskin.”

SOUTH AMERICA

1) In January 2013 came the heart-warming story from a family in Brazil who found their pet tortoise Manuela, 30 years after she had disappeared. She was found in a box of rubbish in a room which hadn’t been accessible for that period of time. A BBC media source in the UK (BBC Radio 4) said it had survived by eating termites.

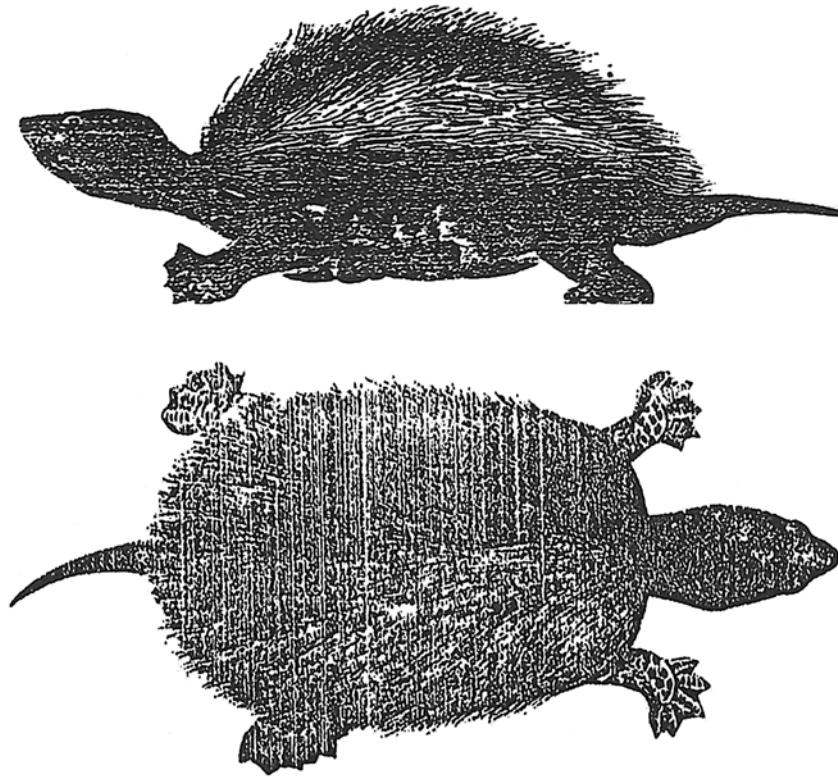
ASIA

1) The following story of a “hairy tortoise” appeared in the *Bradford Observer* of March 13, 1875:

Telescopic Fish and Hairy Tortoise: “. . . A gentleman, Mr. John Meaney, of the Imperial Customs, Hankow, recently arrived from China, brought with him with great care, and most kindly presented to the Aquarium, a little tortoise covered with a singular growth on the shell, three or four inches long, which he believed to be hair. This erroneous (?) belief is doubtless fostered by the Chinese, who induce Europeans to purchase, as great curiosities, their ‘hairy tortoise,’ as some rogues in England sell painted canaries. The so-called ‘hair’ is a filamentous alga, or water weed, which grows on the back of the animal in the pond or tank in which it is kept exposed to the light. I remember examining with Mr. Buckland, some years ago, a similar specimen which had been sent to him. The microscope soon showed us the character of the filiform growth.”—*Land and Water*.



From Cooper (1871)



“Hairy Tortoise” from an ancient Chinese medica (Read, 1977)

“In *The Travels of a Pioneer of Commerce in Pigtails and Petticoats* by T. T. Cooper there is a plate of one of these hairy tortoises from the lakes of Ha-su above Hankow. These curious little animals were two inches long, and covered on the back with a long . . . growth resembling hair. The tortoise being a sacred emblem in China, the Chinese make pets of the hairy tortoise which they keep in basins of water during the summer months, and bury in sand during the winter” (Anonymous, 1878).

2) The Pearl turtle (not to be confused with the North American one) “looks like a lung with eyes and six feet. Found near Canton” (Schafer, 1967). According to Brad LaGrange (pers. comm., 1999):

“Could this be an arthropod of some sort? Not sure about the ‘lung shape’, but the six legs and turtle like appearance sounds like a beetle.” Schafer (1967) continues: “The Vermilion Turtle is found in the South Seas and is as large as a coin. The underside is blood red in colour. Could this be similar as the ‘red softshell’ of the T’ang Dynasty in the fresh waters of Lo-chou and Pien-chou, just north of the Lei-chou Peninsula which had a malignant nature or the Nam-Viet ‘vermilion softshell’ with a blood red belly worn as an amulet by men and women against sword wounds and by women to gain beauty?”

3) Up until at least 1898 there were occasional, (it must be admitted, very occasional) reports of a land tortoise on Hong Kong island. In *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, vol. 14, 1844, a land tortoise was reported. This may have been one of the tortoises mentioned as possibly being part of Hong Kong’s fauna by British naturalist Geoffrey Herklots in *The Hong Kong Countryside* as a “big headed tortoise.” There is a big headed turtle in Hong Kong, *Platysternon megacephalum*. During World War Two, a single specimen of *Ocadia sinensis* turned up buried in a dried-up pond and came to the attention of the British naturalist. It is still not known how it got there. But specimens have turned up since.

4) This image here (opposite) of a giant turtle being carried at a Taoist funeral in Hong Kong on a sedan chair indicates a species of some sort of very large Chinese softshell. Its exact provenance is unknown.

5) According to *A General Collection of . . . Voyages and Travels*, digested by J. Pinkerton, in 1690 a Portuguese ship was lost on one of the northernmost of the Paracel islands with only three or four survivors, “Their food was sea fowls, and tortoises which frequented that island in great numbers.” By 1701, only one man had survived and in this year he was rescued by a passing vessel and taken to Macao.



Turtle at Taoist Funeral

On a Vietnamese web site of the pro-government Nguyen Thai Foundation, quoting from the Encyclopaedist Le Qui Don (1726-1784) in his work *Phu Bien Tap Luc* (*Miscellaneous Records on the Pacification of the Frontiers*) is this: “the fauna and flora of the Paracels, [a group of islands in the South China Sea disputed by Vietnam, China, Taiwan and the Philippines] are described in detail, thus allowing one to compare them with later scientific descriptions made in the twentieth century: sea-swallows and their valuable nests (among the thousands of varieties of birds found on the islands), giant conches called ‘elephant-ear conches’, mother-of-pearls, giant tortoises and smaller varieties of turtles, sea urchins, and so forth.”

On June 18, 1947, *The China Mail* reported:

Canton Loses Its Tortoise

The “City of Rams” has lost its 1000-year-old giant tortoise, which died yesterday, according to Chinese press dispatches from Canton. The tortoise, originally from the Paracels Islands, was one of the main attractions in Canton’s Han Min Public Park. With its passing away, the City Government’s daily budget has been reduced by CNC\$4,000, the amount which had to be paid out daily for the tortoise’s meals.

Dale Drinnon in January 2013 (pers. comm.) pointed out that there was no way of knowing if scientific tests had been carried out to establish whether or not this tortoise really was 1000 years old.

In September 2010 Dale Drinnon posted on the Cryptozoology Online blog on “Galapagos” tortoises in China, as follows: “A while back there was a posting to the CFZ blog on the supposition that giant tortoises were brought back during a supposed Ming Dynasty circumnavigation of the Earth. I did not know what they were talking about at the time, but I think I know better now.

“The supposition that the Chinese were aware of giant tortoises is based on statues of Dragon Turtles in Beijing (Peking) and elsewhere,

and Dragon Turtles are traditional auspicious Chinese legendary creatures. They do not mean the same thing as the Black Warrior Tortoise of the North, which is a constellation. Looking at the depictions of the Dragon turtles you can see that the heads are vaguely shaped like a Galapagos tortoise (Freely interpreted to add 'Dragonlike' features such as whiskers) and the long neck is similar. *But* there are Tortoises nearly as large and of much the same anatomy at the Aldabara Islands near Madagascar, and while it is theory that the Ming Chinese made it to the Galapagos Islands, it is on the other hand a plain fact that we know the Ming Chinese reached East Africa and Madagascar. Their distinctive chin is found all over the place.

“Besides that much, there used to be many other islands with giant tortoises, including some islands of Indonesia. And at one point cryptid Giant Tortoises could well have co-existed with humans in India and China—old Greek records imply that much. So



Dragon Tortoise (CC) Jonathan O'Donnell

there are any number of alternative candidates that would be more likely than the Galapagos giant tortoises, with a favouritism on Aldabara ones. (But not discounting the possibility that the Chinese also knew of such tortoises on Madagascar or any of a number of other places. Chinese were fond of drawing Dragon Tortoises all over their maps in the spirit of 'Here There Be Dragons.')

6) According to Chad Arment (2000): "This past December [1999] I was contacted by a Russian zoologist who had come across my site and wished to know if I knew of anyone who might wish to sponsor a trip to Northern Mongolia. It seems that a Russian geologist came across some strange 'turtle like' traces on the sandy bank of one of the North-Mongolian lakes. The large tracks were seen annually between 1985 and 1991.

"In a very cursory search I was unable to find much info on Mongolian herps. I don't have access to the Russian herp journals, unfortunately, so have no idea as to which turtles are found in Mongolia. I did find an older book that mentioned seals in some of Mongolia's inland lakes, but I haven't been able to confirm that. Would a seal's flippers create turtle like impressions?"

AUSTRALIA

1) The Moka Moka was supposedly a giant turtle from Queensland:

"Gigantic Sea Turtle". Examples of this very large species of marine turtle have been recorded in areas of the South Pacific, and some fine skeletal remains have been recovered in Australia. Relatively current reports say that in Queensland there is a massive turtle known as Moka Moka. One report by a young woman named Lovell, a resident of that area, was recorded in 1890. She said that the sea turtle had either teeth or serrated jaw bones. She went on to state that "what I saw of it was about 27 or 28 feet, but I think it must be 30 feet in all. Whilst its head

was out of the water it kept its mouth open, and, as I could not see any nostrils, I fancy it breaths through its mouth. The jaws are about 18 inches in length; the head and neck greenish white, with large white spots on the neck, and a band of white round a very black eye” (Sweeney, 1972).

- 2) The Effects of the Recent Rains
 The Strange Discovery of a Turtle
 The West Australian, February 10, 1896
 Masters and party caught a turtle the other day in one of the trenches. This catch aroused a mild sensation, the turtle being discovered far from anything like permanent water.

EUROPE

- 1) There are several cases of sea turtles in UK waters:

Oxford Journal, December 20, 1766

Dublin, Dec. 6: A Turtle was caught on the coast of Fingal, which measures four Feet in Length, and weighs 500 Weight. This is the first turtle that ever was taken on this coast, which makes it much feared that some ship from the West Indies has been wrecked.

Oxford Journal, March 5, 1768:

A few Days ago a live West India Turtle was caught near Portland, four feet long, and near five hundred weight having the Letters W R engraved on its back.

According to the fourth edition of R. Lee’s *Anecdotes of the Habits and Instincts of Birds, Reptiles and Fishes*, “A hawksbill turtle was once caught in the Severn, and kept in a gentleman’s pond ’til the ensuing winter.” Thomas Bell (1839) gave more details:

“The history of this species as a British visitant is confined to the mere notice of its accidental occurrence on three different occasions on the shores of Great Britain. Sibbald states that he received the shell of one which ‘came into Orkney;’ Dr. Fleming says, ‘I have credible testimony of its having been taken at Papa Stour, one of the West Zetland Islands;’ and the late Dr. Turton has mentioned an instance of one which ‘in the year 1774 was taken in the Severn, and placed in the fish-ponds of author’s father, where it lived till winter.’ The West Zetland Islands and Papa Stour are off the Shetland Islands.”

A Turtle Caught off Co. Cork

Belfast Newsletter, January 17, 1834

A few days ago, a turtle weighing above 2 cwt. was hooked off Castlehaven, by some fishermen, who had never seen such a fish before, and some of them being unwilling to make acquaintance with it, the captor was obliged to take a turn of a rope round his prize and tow it into Castle Townshend, when the offer of 30s. had a quick effect in removing the prejudices of the fishermen against their capture. It is a very rare occurrence to find turtle in these seas.

Hampshire Advertiser, January 6, 1838

This week a fine large green turtle was caught on the north shore, and retailed in this town at the low price of eight pence per lb. It is supposed to have escaped, or been thrown overboard, from some homeward bound Indiaman. It weighed 3 cwt.

Freeman's Journal, July 9, 1849

A fine young turtle was caught in the Cork channel, on Friday, contiguous to the city.

Sussex Advertiser June 21, 1859

One day last week a very small turtle was caught in Yarmouth Haven, in a net. According to those

most conversant with the fishing interest of the town, this is the first time that ever such a circumstance has occurred, and speculation, therefore, is rife as to where it could possibly have come from.

A Natural Curiosity at Bridlington Quay

Leeds Mercury, October 27, 1871

On Wednesday last, John Barnett and William Sawdon, of Bridlington Quay, fishermen, caught in their net in the bay a very large turtle. They towed it into the harbour, and landed it on the shore between seven and eight p.m. It is something over 7ft long, and 3ft. 6 inches across. It is conjectured to weigh from six to seven hundredweight. It is said to be the first turtle ever caught or seen at Bridlington. It has come just in time for the grand banquet to be given on the Monday next to the Prince and Princess of Wales and the other distinguished guests expected to be then at Scarborough'. In June, 1870, a large turtle was caught in the Downs, and taken to Ramsgate. It was a puzzle to all who saw it, how it had come there. Some supposed it might have got into the Gulf Stream, while others thought it had gone with a ship that had been wrecked. The same question may arise as to the turtle landed at Bridlington, viz., How it got into Bridlington Bay?

A Turtle Caught at the Broomielaw, Glasgow

Evening Telegraph, June 12, 1877

Yesterday morning, shortly after nine o'clock, as one of the boatmen who attend ships mooring in the stream carrying their hawsers ashore, etc, was out, saw what at first was thought to be a large skate or fish of similar description coming up with the tide near the surface of the water, and alive. He managed to get it lifted into his boat, but by the time he reached the quay it was dead. It proved to be an ordinary

sized turtle, and the lucky finder at once conveyed it home. Various conjectures were made at the time of its landing as to the reason of its appearance in the foetid waters of Glasgow harbour, but the one most generally credit was that it had slipped overboard from some ship coming up the river.

Belfast Newsletter, January 16, 1882

A turtle was caught in the Solent last week by the crew of one of the Portsmouth and Ryde steam packets. The appearance of a turtle in such a latitude is regarded as an extraordinary circumstance, and the fish has been forwarded to the Brighton Aquarium.

Hampshire Telegraph, March 19, 1887

The dinners at the Sun and the Green Dragon [Newport, Isle of Wight] were greatly in request. It was at the latter house that the historic 200 lb turtle, caught in the mud at Newport on November 18th, 1799, found a peaceful sepulchre in the grateful stomachs of Lord Holmes and the Newport Corporation.

The Country-side Magazine of July 25, 1908, mentioned a large leatherback turtle measuring just over 7 feet long and nearly the same wide: "A very fine specimen of the Leathery Turtle . . . was recently captured at Pwhelli, a Cardigan Bay fishing port and a fashionable North Wales health resort. Its appearance in such northerly latitudes naturally elicited considerable conjectures as to its presence in such unfrequented quarters inasmuch as the scope of its perambulations is confined to the tropical and sub-tropical seas of both hemispheres although instances of its presence in northerly latitudes are recorded, but only once or twice has it made its appearance in British waters within the last century" (Owen, 1908).



Leatherback captured at Pwhelli (Owen, 1908)

Turtle and Shark Caught in Same Net

Dundee Courier, June 19, 1916

A remarkable turtle, weighing nearly a ton, was landed at Penzance yesterday. It measured about 8 feet long by 4 feet broad, and was caught alive in a net off Scilly. It is one of the most remarkable specimens of the species—the usual habitat of which is the Brazilian coast—ever seen in British waters. In the same net was caught a thresher shark, the body of which was nearly 12 feet long excluding the tail measurement.

According to Neil Arnold's (2011) *Mystery Animals of London*, "During the Summer of 1998 a very 'out of place' creature was found in the Thames. A Leatherback Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) the largest of the sea turtles which can reach a weight of 1770 lb—was found washed up in east London by Tony Clancy and Steve Connor."

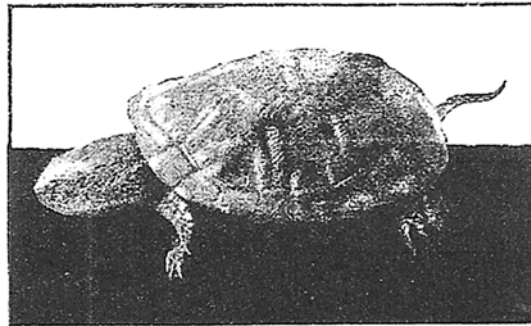
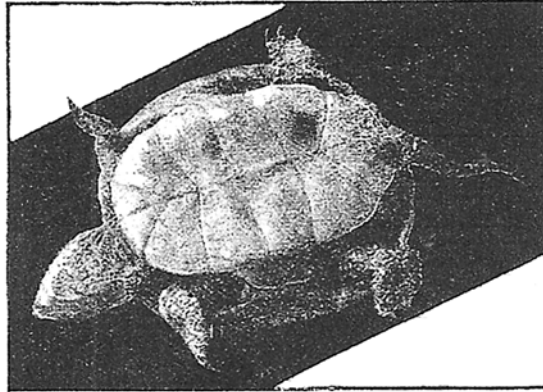
2) In England, in Blaxhall, Suffolk, in 1889 to be precise, "eleven examples of the European water tortoise were placed in a pond . . . ,

but most of them soon wandered away in different directions. During the three following years specimens were from time to time found about the village and in 1894, 2 were discovered in the river Alde at about the same distance in an opposite direction, and a third in a ditch at Iken Cliff, more than two miles off. During the years 1894 and 1895, 49 of these tortoises were turned into ditches and ponds in Blaxhall. A few were at the same time liberated in some water adjoining a garden at Little Glemham. These latter appeared regularly near the same spot for several summers in succession, but have now ceased to do so. In all cases the tortoises remained in a healthy and thriving condition, but no young ones have been seen."

Blackburn Standard, September 27, 1898

Thames Tortoises. An interesting addition to the British fauna is reported from the Thames Valley. A wild tortoise or turtle has been taken from the river, and is now contentedly living upon a diet of worms in a glass bowl. It belongs to the order of New World marsh tortoises, of which the formidable alligator tortoise of North America is the best example. This creature will snap off half your hand if you put it within reach; but boating parties on the Thames need not fear the loss of any extremities on account of the discovery under notice: for the marsh tortoise which has been caught is only the small tortoise of America, measuring about four inches, exclusive of tail, and can only cope with small worms. Yet he resembles the alligator tortoise in every essential detail except size and strength; and differs from the common or garden tortoise of the street barrows in possessing a rather thinner and flatter shell, and in being ornamented with bright yellow speckles and splashes. He is, however, extremely active on land, and can swim with agility, and may therefore be able to hold his own in the amphibious struggle for existence in the shallows of the Thames.

Fresh Water Tortoise. This creature possesses special interest because it seems likely that it will become established in Britain. The writer has taken one specimen in a



Photos.]

[J. T. Newman.]

Fresh-water Tortoise (*Emys*) under and upper sides.

This interesting creature is occasionally found now in English rivers, etc.

Thames backwater, and several have been taken by anglers. It is common in Southern and East Central Europe, and is eaten wherever it is found. The genus (*Emys*) is distinguished from all other tortoises except the box-tortoises, by a hinge across the plastron—the armour on the underside, shown in the upper picture—whereby, after withdrawing inside the shell, it can close both ends. The lower figure shows the shelving carapace, or upper armour, and long tail, by which it is distinguished from the box-tortoises.

In 1906 these tortoises were still surviving in the Thames Valley and other parts of England according to *The Country-side* of July 21, 1906.

According to *British Reptiles and Amphibians* by E. A. Ellis the European Pond Tortoise bred successfully in Suffolk in 1929. "By 1929 they were very numerous in one spot; in the spring of 1932 a nearly mature tortoise was seen and two years later one was found in the adjacent parish of Snape." R. S. R. Fitter in *The Ark in Our Midst* said: "Other introductions are known to have been made at Shere, Surrey, in 1890-91; Old Park pond, St. Lawrence, Isle of Wight, some years before 1907; Frensham Hall ponds near Haslemere, Surrey, in 1905-10; Lambay Island, Co. Dublin, in 1906; and Woburn Park, Bedfordshire, where some still remained in 1950. There is no evidence that any of these tortoises bred, but several were still alive at St. Lawrence in November 1907 and in that summer one was seen in the millpond at Carisbrooke, about eight miles away, where perhaps it had been put independently.

"Certainly these tortoises must either have been introduced on other occasions or have a tendency to wander quite a distance, for there are a surprising number of casual records in South-east England, starting with one that was dug up, evidently hibernating, in fen peat at Ludham, Norfolk, in February 1904, some forty miles from the Blaxhall district. Three odd specimens have been seen in Surrey; one in a gravel-pit at Beddington in April 1933; one basking on a log in the upper Pen Pond in Richmond Park in July 1934, and one in a pond on Bookham Common before 1935. Another was found in the Royal Military Canal at Appledore, Kent, in 1938. . . . In 1905-10 a number of Snapper Terrapins (*Chelydra serpentina*) and Painted Terrapins (*Chrysemys picta*), both from North America, were put in the Frensham Hall ponds in Surrey. When Mr. D. F. Leney came to drain these ponds about ten years ago [i.e. about 1949—Richard] he found two or three snappers and a dozen painted, still there and sent most of them to the London Zoo."

3) On July 16, 1766, *The London Magazine or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer*, vol. 35, said:

A land tortoise was taken out of farmer Platt's pond, at Hendon; it has been there some years, though no one can tell how it came there.

The following letter indicates to my mind that in Essex, south-east England about 55 years ago a small colony of tortoises established more than a transitory presence, at least:

Dear Mr. Muirhead:

By luck I saw your letter about tortoises in the wild in a recent issue of the *Cambridge Evening News*. I hope the following information helps you.

Between 1959 and 1964 my uncle kept a caravan for weekend and holiday use at Great Gibcracks Farm, near Chelmsford in Essex. The farm was about half a mile from the road, up a long and rutted drive. It was an extraordinary place, an Edwardian model farm built by an eccentric who placed busts of Dante and other poets in copses, had a swimming pool dug and planted exotic trees and shrubs. By the 1960s it was falling to pieces about the current owner.

Beyond the farm were two cottages and then woodland. The nearest houses to the farm, apart from the cottages, were almost a mile away.

In late May or early June 1964 my younger brother, Nigel, and I found a tortoise moving along a furrow in a ploughed field immediately alongside the farm. (The field had been ploughed at Easter then left.) I can't be more precise about the date; I do know that I'd been given a weekend away from preparing for the O levels looming over me.

The tortoise just fitted on my palm so would have been almost 6" long. We had kept several tortoises

as pets in the past; this one had a darker shell than I could recall seeing before and yellow mottling between the eyes. It appeared to be a spur thighed tortoise.

We went to the farm, the cottages and then to the houses nearest the field but no one knew anything about the tortoise. Using the local bush telegraph we let people living farther away know but the tortoise was never claimed and became our pet, with the name Shostakovich—why that name was selected I can't remember. Shostakovich was found dead in summer, 1967.

In 1980 Nigel mentioned he had talked with a man who lived in a village called Bicknacre in the 1950s and 1960s; Bicknacre is not far from Gt. Gibcracks and we sometimes walked there through the woods. The man said that he twice found tortoises in the fields but had never traced their owners. Sadly, Nigel died in 1990 and I remember no details, like the man's name.

I hope that your research is fruitful; the adjustment of animals to British conditions has always interested me. I have wondered if the Surrey puma and Exmoor beast are abandoned pets that are now acclimatized. I am sure you know about the scorpions that colonized the railways station at Ongar in Essex.

It would be more interesting though to discover native tortoises and native pumas. I hope one day to read about your research.

Yours sincerely.

J.S. Holford-Miettinen

OCEANS AND ISLANDS

1) The British paper the *Alnwick Mercury* (August 14, 1880) carried the following story about an event off New Jersey:

A Sea of Turtles. If the *Galveston News* is to be believed, Captain Rodgers, owner of the schooner *James Andrews*, has witnessed a sight which would have gladdened the heart of many an alderman (says the *Daily Telegraph*). Passing between Sabine and Calcasian his vessel encountered bad weather, and the sea became very lumpy, when the schooner suddenly entered a field of green turtles, "some of them being as large as an ordinary-sized round table." Strange to relate, the skipper observed that they were all on their backs, and noting this he proceeded to measure the area they covered when he found the space to be eight miles in width and ten miles in length, wondered why the Spanish mackerel were seen leaping high in the air in every direction, as if determined to escape from the sea. Neither the mackerel, any more than Captain Rodgers, could understand where all these monsters had come from, and he has applied to the nautical authorities of the American Government for an explanation of how it happened that the turtles were on their backs. A still more remarkable thing in connection with the spectacle which Captain Rodgers thus beheld is the statement that wherever the turtles went they seemed to carry the storm with them; so that while in their vicinity the schooner *James Andrews* very nearly foundered, no sooner had she passed by the monsters "as large as round tables", then fair weather and a good sea presented themselves, and she was able to make satisfactory headway. Evidently Captain Rodgers has reason to be surprised. What with the eight miles by ten miles of turtles, flying sea mackerel, and the storm that passed in so strange a manner, he had good ground for asking somebody to assist him in explaining this phenomenon.

2) In 1883 *Scientific American* reported the following fascinating story of a giant turtle off Newfoundland (not far from the case of the *Rhapsody* below):

A Large Turtle

“Captain Augustus G. Hall and the crew of the schooner *Annie L. Hall* vouch for the following: On March 30, while on the Grand Bank, in latitude 40° 10', longitude 33°, they discovered an immense live trunk turtle, which was at first thought to be a vessel bottom up. The schooner passed within twenty-five feet of the monster, and those on board had ample opportunity to estimate its dimensions by a comparison with the length of the schooner. The turtle was at least 40 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 30 feet from the apex of the back to the bottom of the under shell. The flippers were 20 feet long. It was not deemed advisable to attempt its capture.”

According to Dale Drinnon (2009): “There is a semi-legendary turtle called the ‘Father of All Turtles’ by Sumatrans. I say ‘semi-legendary’ because huge turtles have been reported from various parts of the world’s oceans.

“Accounts of these remarkable animals first reached Europe in the early nineteenth century when Dutch settlers in what is now Indonesia reported native legends of enormous turtles. These stories eventually filtered back to their homeland in western Europe. However sightings of such beasts are not confined to the tropical waters of the East Indies. In June 1956 seamen of the cargo steamer *Rhapsody*, reported that they had seen a huge turtle about 45 feet long with an all-white shell south of Nova Scotia. The Canadian coastguards warned local boats about this gigantic reptile with flippers 15 feet long and capable of raising its head 8 feet out of the water. Seventy three years earlier, not far away on the Newfoundland Banks, a turtle 60 feet long and 40 feet wide had been reported.”

In September 1959 Tex Geddes and James Gavin “saw a giant turtle in the sea off the small island of Soay in the Inner Hebrides for an hour. . . . They had been watching marine creatures including some killer-whales and a basking shark, when Gavin noticed a black shape on the water about two miles away in the direction of the Skye shore. Although this was where the killer-whales had last been seen, Geddes was convinced that this was something new. He later wrote: ‘I am afraid we both stared in amazement as the object came towards us, for this beast steaming slowly in our direction was like some hellish monster of prehistoric times. The head was definitely reptilian, about two feet six high with large protruding eyes. There was no visible nasal organs, but a large red gash of a mouth which seemed to cut the head in half and which appeared to have distinct lips. There was at least two feet of clear water behind the neck, less than a foot of which we could see, and the creature’s back which rose sharply to its highest point some three to four feet out of the water and fell away gradually towards the after end. I would say we saw 8 to 10 ft. of back on the water line.’ . . . However there is a great deal of evidence for the existence of giant marine chelonians. In the cretaceous period . . . there was a giant turtle called *Archelon*. It was found in the sea of Niobrara over what is now the state of Kansas in the U.S.A. The carapace was twelve feet long and the skull was three feet long. Some zoologists have speculated that ‘The Father of all the Turtles’ is a surviving population of *Archelon*.” (Drinnon, 2009)

In fact giant turtles have been reported since Roman times:

“The gigantic Chelonians which once abounded in India and the Indian seas are now entirely extinct; but we have had little difficulty in believing the accounts of their actual and late existence contained in the works of Pliny and Ælian since the discovery of the *Colossochelys*, described by Dr. Falconer, in the Upper Miocene deposits of the Siwalik Hills in North-Western India. The shell of *Colossochelys Atlas* (Falconer and Cantley) measured twelve feet, and the whole animal nearly twenty.

“Pliny, [*The Natural History of Pliny*. Translated by J. Bostock and H. T. Biley, 6 vols.] who published his work on Natural History

about A. D. 77, states that the turtles of the Indian Sea are of such vast size that a single shell is sufficient to roof a habitable cottage, and that among the islands of the Red Sea the navigation is mostly carried on in boats formed from this shell.

“Ælian, [*Æliani de Natura Animalium*, F. Jacobs. Jenæ, 1832.] about the middle of the third century of our era, is more specific in his statement, and says that the Indian river-tortoise is very large, and in size not less than a boat of fair magnitude; also, in speaking of the Great Sea in which is Taprobana (Ceylon), he says: ‘There are very large tortoises generated in this sea, the shell of which is large enough to make an entire roof; for a single one reaches the length of fifteen cubits, so that not a few people are able to live beneath it, and certainly secure themselves from the vehement rays of the sun; they make a broad shade, and so resist rain that they are preferable for this purpose to tiles, nor does the rain beating against them sound otherwise than if it were falling on tiles. Nor, indeed, do those who inhabit them have any necessity for repairing them, as in the case of broken tiles, for the whole roof is made out of a solid shell so that it has the appearance of a cavernous or undermined rock, and of a natural roof.’

“El Edrisi, in his great geographical work, [*Géographie d’Edrisi*, traduite de l’Arabe en Français] 2 Vols. completed A.D. 1154, speaks of them as existing down to his day, but as his book is admitted to be a compilation from all preceding geographical works, he may have been simply quoting, without special acknowledgment, the statements given above. He says, speaking of the Sea of Herkend (the Indian Ocean west of Ceylon), ‘It contains turtles twenty cubits long, containing within them as many as one thousand eggs’” (Gould, 1992).

“In the T’ang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) there were stories of giant turtles in the South China Sea;” the seas off Canton also produced a large “osprey turtle” (whatever that may mean) not especially numinous (Schafer, E 1967).

“According to a Chinese Materia Medica dating from around

1597 and published by Bernard Read in the *Peking Natural History Bulletin* in the 1930s there was a creature called the Yuan or Great Sea Turtle. . . . *Li Shih-chen* states that according to the *Shuo Wen* . . . the *yuan* is a big turtle, the largest of all the scaly animals. Hence the written character *yuan* is used, because *yuan* means big. . . . Su Sung states the *yuan* comes from rivers and lakes of the South. (The *Ling-wai-tai-ta* describes the big sea-turtle found near K'in chou, the westernmost part of Kwangtung, and which it calls *pi tai mao*.) It is big being 10 to 20 feet in circumference. Southerners prepare it for food. The flesh has five colours but it is chiefly white. The eggs are round as large as chicken's or ducks eggs, one to two hundred are laid at one time. People dig them out and salt them for food. When boiled the white does not congeal." . . .

"*T'ao Hung-cheng*. It is said when this turtle is old it is able to change into a dryad . . . so if it is not an urgent matter it is best not eaten. *Li Shih-chen* states that the *yuan* is like the soft shelled turtle but it is large. On its back it has protuberances. It is yellowish green in colour, it has a big head with a yellow neck, the bowels are connected with the head. It mates with the female *pieh*. The eggs are hatched by its thoughtful care. Hence the saying, when the *yuan* calls the *pieh* answers. *Huai Nan Tzu* states that burning the fat of the *yuan* will attract the *pieh*, it is influenced by the familiar smell. *Chang Ting* (Shih Liao Pen T'sao) states that the fat rubbed on iron makes it bright. It is also said that it eats fish in the water, and has a human like body. It has twelve kinds of flesh (That of the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, chicken, dog, pig. This is not explained but probably refers to its bird like head, its rat like tail, its dragon like scaly coat, its fat like a sheep, claws like a tiger, all these qualities combined in a great archetype.) or organs, which when sliced and hung up overnight extend in length (and thus show their snake like character.) There was also a turtle called the Vermillion Turtle found in the South Seas as large as a coin. The underside was blood red in colour" (Tsu-k'uang, 1997).

3) On July 19, 1924, the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* reported thus:

Lived For 1000 Years

The other day a cable from the island of Samoa in the South Pacific announced the discovery on one of the Tonga Islands of a giant Galapagos turtle. What made the discovery important enough to be sent over the cables was that upon the turtles back was engraved the name of that redoubtable explorer, Captain Cook, and the date 1773.

The great turtle must have been old when Captain Cook found it 150 years ago for the despatches said he was blind and his joints creaked as he walked (says *Popular Science*.)

In March 1972, the Abingdon (Pinta) Island giant tortoise, *G. elephantopus abingdoni* was found after supposedly being extinct since the early 1960s. “Even more mysterious than the current status of Abingdon’s giant tortoise is that of *G. e. phantastica*—the subspecies of Galapagos giant tortoise endemic to Narborough Island. It is presently known only from a single specimen, obtained there in 1906 by Rollo H. Beck, leader of an expedition from the California Academy of Sciences. Yet in 1964, several fresh faecal droppings were found by J. Hendrickson on Narborough’s southern slopes, implying that this is another subspecies skilled in the art of eluding scientific searches.”

In early 2010 Cryptomundo reported (Coleman 2010) that nine captive Galápagos tortoises were actually representatives of an extinct species: “Nine captive Galápagos tortoises have turned out to be an extinct species. New genetic research has identified the captive giant tortoises as descendants of an ‘extinct’ species formerly endemic to Floreana Island in the Pacific’s Galápagos Islands. In an article published this week in the peer-reviewed online Public Library of Science journal *PloS ONE*, the abstract notes:

“Although not unusual to find captive relicts of species lost in the wild, rarely are presumed extinct species rediscovered outside of their native range. A recent study detected living descendents of an extinct Galápagos tortoise species (*Chelonoidis elephantopus*) once endemic to Floreana Island on the neighbouring island of Isabela. This finding adds to the growing cryptic diversity detected among these species in the wild. There also exists a large number of Galápagos tortoises in captivity of ambiguous origin. The recently accumulated population-level haplotypic and genotypic data now available for *C. elephantopus* add a critical reference population to the existing database of 11 extant species for investigating the origin of captive individuals of unknown ancestry.”

4) In September 1998 *The Guardian* reported on a race of swift, lightweight tortoises which lived on the Mascarene Islands in the south-west Indian Ocean until the early 1800s:

“Jeremy Austin, of the Natural History Museum, told the British Association festival of science in Cardiff yesterday that the three Mascarene islands of Reunion, Mauritius and Rodrigues, in the south-west Indian Ocean, may have had six species of giant tortoise. On each island there was a round shelled tortoise, and sometimes a second species in which the front of the shell was raised.

“Most tortoises have thick shells. ‘The thick, bony shells also make tortoises heavy and slow,’ said Dr Austin. ‘In the Mascarene Islands there were no large predators, so the tortoises adapted to the enemy free island life by reducing the thickness of their shell to the bare minimum, and having much larger openings for the legs and head. This would have reduced the weight of the shell enormously, leading to the possibility that these animals were the world’s only lightweight racing tortoise.’ . . . ‘We now know that the Mascarene islands were colonised only once by tortoises,’ said Dr Austin. ‘The two species on Rodrigues evolved there

independently of the other two islands, and at least one of the Reunion species arrived from Mauritius in quite recent times.”

5) “Sea-Mystery Turtle” Captured

Popular Mechanics, Sept. 1907, Vol. 9, No. 9

One of the puzzles of the ocean has just come to the surface at San Diego Bay, California, when a gigantic sea turtle was captured by Julius Solissa, a Greek fisherman, in whose net the huge creature was became entangled. This giant turtle weighed 1,902 lb—almost a ton—and its shell measures 5 ft and 2 in from tip to tip. The strangest feature of it all was, that on the top of this turtle’s shell somewhat plainly carved or burned was the following inscription:

“British Ship ‘Sea Bride’ August 12 1881 3 South, 86, West. If found, please notify Thomas Fletcher, Brawley Road, Revington, England.”

From this brand it would appear that this huge turtle was captured 26 years ago in the South Pacific, and after being lettered, was again committed to the mercies of the sea. If the creature was caught where the marking indicates, then his turtleship must have travelled hundreds of leagues in order to reach San Diego Bay. The shell with the mysterious inscription, will be shortly added to the Museum of the California State University.

6) On February 18, 1925, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported a sea serpent with some similarities to a turtle in Australian waters:

The Sea Serpent

To the Editor of the *Herald*

Sir,—In your leader of last Saturday you mention that the recent report of the appearance of a “sea serpent” is the first record from Australian waters.

In Saville-Kent's book on the Great Barrier Reef, published in 1893, there is a full description, with drawings, of an alleged sea serpent, seen by Miss Lovell at the Sandy Island lighthouse, Queensland. The description is given in great detail, and is signed also by six other witnesses including two of the lightkeepers, namely, James Alsbury and William Lees; and is dated June 8, 1890. The report was also published in "Land and Water" of January 3, 1891. In some respects it resembled a giant turtle, with a carapace "quite five feet high". In front there was a long neck, with the head showing a large mouth well supplied with teeth. Behind there was a long, scaly tail, "quite twelve feet long. It had a thick fleshy fin near the end, about three feet from the flukes." The flukes forming the tail "were semi-transparent." The rest of the beast was of a "beautiful silver-grey, shading to white." When first seen it was apparently stranded in shallow water.

I am etc

F.A.R.

Another turtle-like animal of an unidentified nature is sometimes seen at sea. On August 25, 1934, *The Western Australian* reported:

Sea Monster

Launch Party's Report

Turtle-headed "Snake" Sighted

Brisbane, Aug 24—Following reports of the sighting of a sea monster by Innisfail and Townsville fishermen on August 13, a party from Bowen has had a similar experience. Three men aboard a launch in the vicinity of Gloucester Passage noticed a dark object on the surface of the water. At first they thought the object was a whale, but suddenly it raised its

head eight or ten feet out of the water. Then they saw that it was a huge creature resembling a snake, 30 to 35 feet long. It had a head like a turtle and a body like a big-ribbed hose. The men had no rifle aboard and did not stop the launch. When last seen the monster was making towards the opposite side of the harbour from Bowen.

6) In 1993 and March 18-19, 1994, there were sightings of an unidentified marine animal by some fishermen off the coast of Bahia de los Vientos, near Necochea, Argentina. It was nicknamed “Joselito” (because it was sighted on March 19, the day of “Saint Joseph” in Spanish San José). The colour of the animal was dark brown to black—“with an enormous head, very big and its neck and back with a serrated edge.” It was also seen in August 2007: Austin Whittal, on his Patagonian Monsters website, says it could have been a leatherback turtle. The local museum (Museo De Ciencias Naturales), on its website, says a leatherback was caught by some fishermen in 1995.

Animals and Men (Anonymous 2007) gives more information:

Turtle or Sea Monster

“In August, Argentine fishermen saw and photographed what they believe is a sea monster. They saw the creature’s back rise back rise up from the sea off the coast of Bahia de los Vientos, near to where a sea monster, that was christened Joselito, was seen in March 1994.

“Around 20 people, including Juan Iniguez, Carlos Mino and his son Fabián, saw the creature in 1994. Iniguez and the Minos said they had seen a black thing 10-12 metres from their boat as they pulled up their fishing nets. This sighting was collaborated by other nearby fishing vessels, and people with whom they were in radio contact. Joselito was apparently peaceful and showed no interest in the

fishermen and their boat so they were able to view it for a few minutes, the fishermen said that they only ever saw part of its back but it was very large and had staggered fins 'like a dinosaur'.

"The 2007 sighting and photograph is of an animal approximately 2 metres long, and only the back of the creature breaks the surface of the water. Local news reports postulate that the image is that of a known animal, the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) which is almost certainly correct. The 1994 sighting of Joselito may also have been of a leatherback turtle based on similarities between leatherbacks and the sighting. It is likely that the fishermen would not have recognised it when they saw it because Argentina is out of the leatherback's normal range, with individuals only turning up very rarely."

The largest leatherback turtle ever discovered measures almost 3 m (9 ft) in length and weighed 914 kg (2,016 lb) and is on permanent display in the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff.

The Winter 1990 (Vol. 9, No. 4) issue of the now defunct *International Society of Cryptozoology Newsletter* reported on the above mentioned leatherback thus: "New Turtle Record. The largest chelonian species known is the marine leatherback, *Demochelys coriacea*, the Indo-Pacific subspecies of which—*D. c. schlegeli*—has been thought to be the biggest. The record was held by a specimen of this subspecies, which weighed 1,908 lb (865 kg) and measured 8 feet, 4 inches (2.54 m). It was caught alive in Monterey Bay, California in August of 1961 (see *Wood's Animal Facts, Newsletter*, Summer, 1984). However, this record has recently been surpassed by a specimen of the Atlantic sub-specimen of the Atlantic subspecies, *D. c. coriacea*, indicating that there is probably little difference in size between the two subspecies. The record was broken on September 23, 1988, when an enormous leatherback turtle was found dead on a beach in Wales. Now on permanent display in

the National Museum of Wales, the giant weighed 2,016 lb (916 kg), and had a total length of 9 feet (2.7 m), and its curved carapace length was 8 feet, 5 inches (2.56 m)—1 inch (2.5 cm) longer than the entire length of the previous record-holder.

“The cause of death was found to be drowning—a piece of ingested plastic may have been a contributing factor. How much bigger might it have grown had it not died? Might there be other, larger leatherback turtles in the oceans? Who knows?”

The late, tireless collector of anomalies William Corliss (1994) pointed out the following about the leatherback:

The leatherback is the only turtle without a rigid shell. Perhaps it needs a flexible shell for its deep dives?

These turtles are *warm blooded*.

Bones of the leatherback are more like marine mammals.

“No one seems to understand the evolutionary implications of this.”

Leatherbacks dive as deeply as 3000 feet, which is strange because they feed almost exclusively on jellyfish, most of which are surface feeders.

They can stay submerged for up to 48 hours. How?

Their brains weigh 4 grams, 4 grams less than a rat's!

Leatherbacks' intestines contain waxy balls, rather like the ambergris found in whales' intestines.

The stomachs of leatherbacks seem to contain nothing but jellyfish, which are 97% water. How can the leatherback find enough jellyfish to sustain itself?

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